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Invitation letter by President António Costa to the members of the European Council

As I have already indicated to you, I would like to invite you to an informal retreat that will take place on 3 February in the Château de Limont, close to Brussels, dedicated to the topic of European defence.

I believe we share a similar assessment of the threats Europe is facing. Russia's aggression against Ukraine has brought high-intensity war back to our continent - violating the core principles of international law and threatening European security – coupled with growing hybrid and cyber -attacks on Member States and their economies and societies. Peace in Europe depends on Ukraine winning a comprehensive, just and lasting peace. This geopolitical context, which is also marked by the situation in the Middle East, will remain challenging in the foreseeable future.

The purpose of this meeting is to prepare the ground for the decisions we will have to take and to provide guidance to the Commission and the High Representative as they prepare a white paper on the future of European defence, which will cover joint defence initiatives and the resources necessary to develop them. As foreseen in the Leaders' Agenda, my aim is to return to the subject of defence at the June 2025 European Council.

I propose to base our discussion on two main principles.

First, *Europe needs to assume greater responsibility for its own defence*. It needs to become more resilient, more efficient, more autonomous and a more reliable security and defence actor. In so doing, it will also become a stronger transatlantic partner, including in the context of NATO, in full respect of the security and defence policy of certain Member States and taking into account the security and defence interests of all Member States.

In recent years, Member States have already increased their national defence spending. We know however that substantial additional defence investments are required in order to replenish stocks, upgrade our defence readiness for a broad spectrum of threats – focusing on strategic priorities and critical capability gaps – and strengthen the European Defence Technological and Industrial Base accordingly.

Second, Member States will always be responsible for their armed forces. At the same time, *we have a common interest in cooperating more closely at European level* in order to maximise economies of scale and reduce costs, guarantee interoperability, ensure stable and long-term demand – so as to give more predictability to our industry – and prevent duplication. The level of investment, including in research and development, required to bolster our capacity is not affordable for individual Member States acting on their own. Moreover, effective defence is a 'common good' benefitting all Europeans.

Increased defence investment must also contribute to reinforcing the overall economic competitiveness and cohesion of the European Union through an industrial sector capable of developing its technological excellence across the European Union and contributing to job creation. The goal of strengthening European defence should be taken into account in all relevant Union policies.

In order to prepare the next steps, I would suggest to focus our discussion on the following issues:

- What should be – and how do we define – the defence capabilities that we need to develop in a collaborative way as a matter of priority, due to their importance to the EU´s collective security?
- Do we agree to spend more and better together? How can we accelerate the mobilisation of private financing, and through which EU instruments? How can we best use the EU budget, in the short, medium and long term? In the light of the considerable financing needs, what additional common options can be considered?
- How can we further strengthen and deepen existing partnerships? What should be our goals and priorities with non-EU European partners?

I have invited the NATO Secretary General to join us for lunch. This will offer us a timely opportunity to discuss the most pressing defence-related issues, in particular our support for Ukraine, as well as EU-NATO cooperation.

We will be joined by the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom for a working dinner ahead of the EU-UK Summit that will take place

later this year. This dinner will be the first time Prime Minister Starmer will meet with all 27 Leaders. The UK is a key partner for the European Union, notably in the field of defence. I expect the discussion to focus on that dimension of our relationship.

As for the choreography, we will start our meeting at 11.00h with an exchange of views with the President of the European Parliament. We will then hold a first discussion at 27, followed by the lunch with Secretary General Rutte, a second session among ourselves and the dinner with Prime Minister Starmer.

Finally, I would like to thank Prime Minister Tusk for the close cooperation in the preparation for this meeting.

I look forward to our discussions on 3 February

- Invitation letter by President Costa

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